Effective Teacher - Family Communication: Types, Barriers, Conferences, and Programs

Dr. Kristen Pennycuff Trent

To really communicate one must listen, one must share true meaning, and one must reflect upon the message being shared.

- E. H. Berger

Chapter Six Overview

- Communication
- Communication in Schools
- Roadblocks to Communication
- Effective Communication with Parents
- Parent Education Programs
- Parent-Teacher Conferences

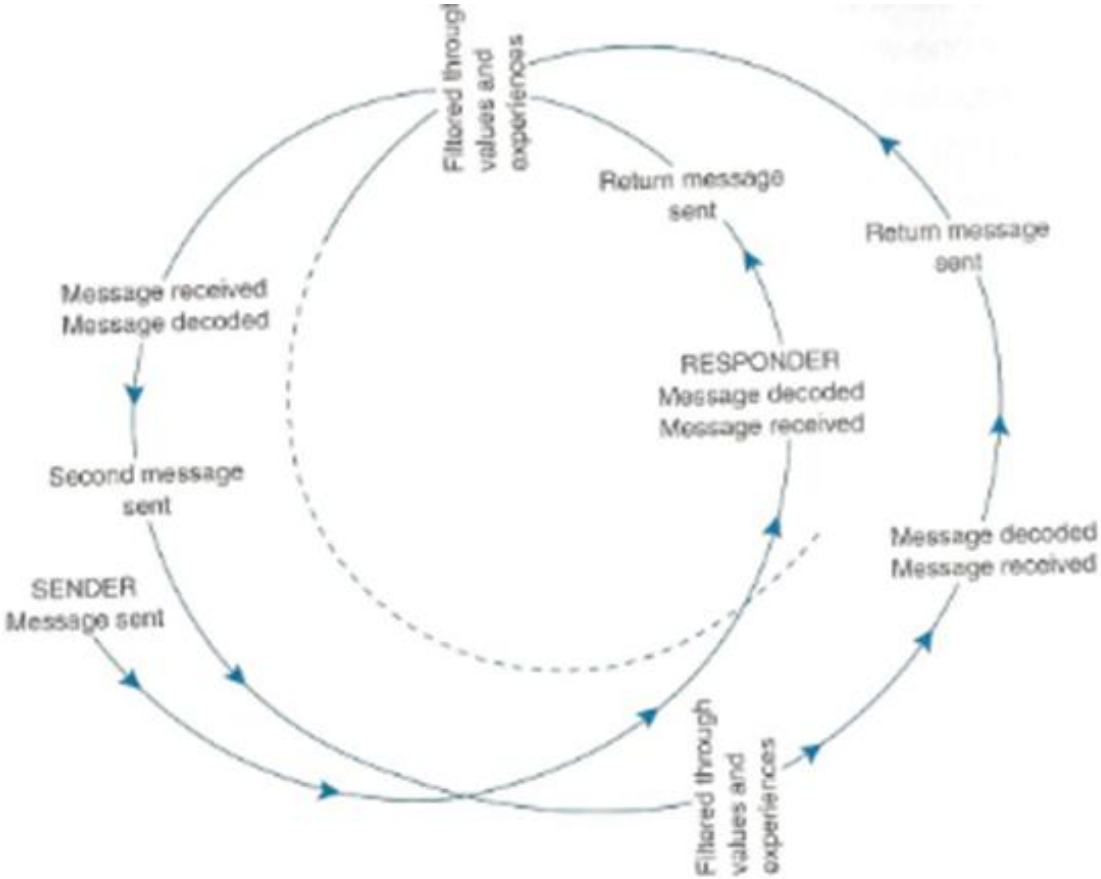
Communication

- Communication -
  - An exchange of information (via verbal commands, written notation, physical gestures, etc) between two or more people.

Communication

- Three Components of Messages
  - words or verbal stimuli;
  - body language or physical stimuli;
  - vocal characteristics or vocal stimuli
    - Cultures differ in ways they convey messages
- Effective communication occurs when intent of message is accurately received

Miscommunication



It is the power of words – what we do with the words- that transforms communication by considering the context and the words in how we communicate.

(Enciso, Katz, Kiefer, Price-Dennis, and Wilson, 2007)

Communication in Schools

- One-way communication in schools can include messages via:
  - Newsletters - class, school, district
  - Notes and letters - notes less formal and short for frequent contact, letters longer and more formal
  - Newspaper
  - Media
  - Handbooks
  - Suggestion Box

Kindergarten Kids

Volume 1*******September 2008***

Welcome to Kindergarten

Gym Days

Ferrone AM - Friday Ferrone PM - Monday
Arbucho AM - Thursday Arbucho PM - Friday

Students must wear sneakers on gym days. Sneakers will not be kept in school. Proper clothing attire for gym suggested. Please remove all jewelry before coming to school on gym days.

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Notify the Teacher

If your child is being picked up by someone other than you, please send a note to the teacher specifying who & when.

Birthdays

We will celebrate birthdays in class. Feel free to send in or make arrangements for treats. Please consider healthy snacks and avoid foods containing nuts. We will set aside a special time during the year to celebrate summer birthdays. The teacher will get in touch with you as your child's birthday approaches.

Treasure Key

Each day a different child will wear the "Treasure Key" necklace home as a reminder that for the next day he/she is to bring in a "treasured" item to show the class. This is a "Show and Tell" activity done on an individual basis which allows one student to have the floor all to him/herself. Be on the lookout for the treasure key necklace to be on your child.

Be sure to check your child's folder each day for homework and important notices.
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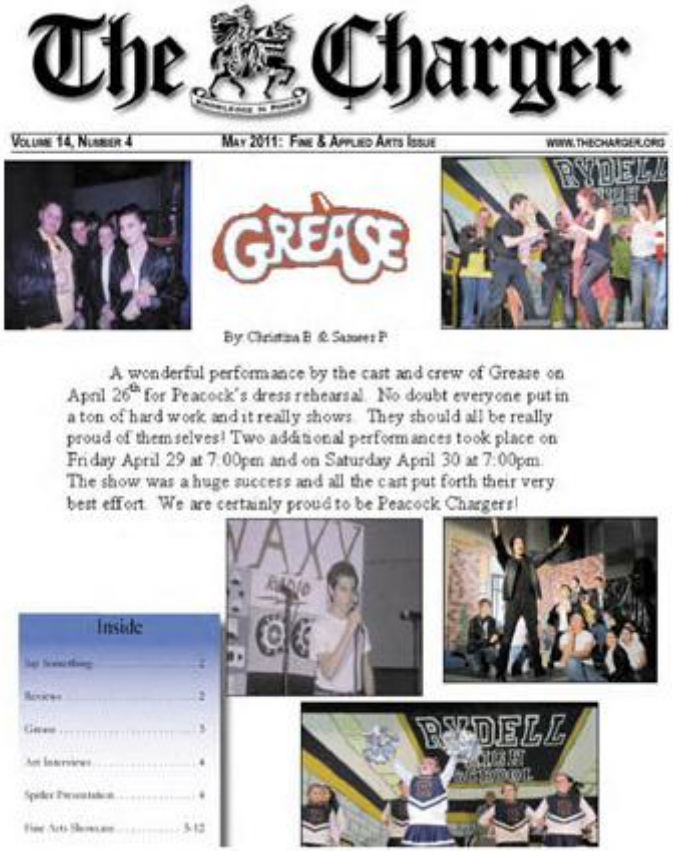
Providenciales Primary School

September Newsletter

School Calendar

Welcome, Everyone to a New School Year

A Busy Summer of Maintenance and Improvements



The Charger

Volume 14, Number 4 May 2011: Fine & Applied Arts Issue www.thecharger.org

Grease

By Christina B & Sameer P

A wonderful performance by the cast and crew of Grease on April 26th for Peacock's dress rehearsal. No doubt everyone put in a ton of hard work and it really shows. They should all be really proud of themselves! Two additional performances took place on Friday April 29 at 7:00pm and on Saturday April 30 at 7:00pm. The show was a huge success and all the cast put forth their very best effort. We are certainly proud to be Peacock Chargers!

Inside

Say Something 2
Reviews 2
Grease 3
Art Interviews 4
Spider Presentation 4
Fine Arts Showcase 5-12

http://thecharger.org/2010/Issue_4/Vol14No4.pdf

Communication in Schools

- Two-way communication in schools can include messages via:
  - Homework Hotline
  - Computer Information Hotline
  - Email
  - Chats
  - Background Material and Assignments Explanation
  - Telephone Calls
  - Home Visits
  - Classroom Visits
  - Participation Visits
  - Visits by invitation
  - Student-Parent Exchange day
  - Breakfasts

Roadblocks to Communication

- Parental Roadblocks
  - My Own &My Child Guardian
    - child is extension of self
  - I Don't Belong
    - feel inadequate for any number of reasons
  - Avoidance
    - don't respect school or had a difficult time themselves
  - Indifferent Parent
    - indifference or problems at home preventing attention
  - Don't Make Waves
    - fear teacher/admin retaliation on child
  - Club-Waving Advocate
    - express concerns through confrontation

Roadblocks to Communication

- School Roadblock
  - Authority Figure
    - neglects parent as partner
  - Sympathizing Counselor
    - focus on inadequacy of child
  - Pass the Buck
    - personnel differ to other departments
  - Protect the Empire
    - a united, invincible staff that seem they don't care
  - Busy Teacher
    - need to schedule time for communication

Teacher Insights: Communicating with Culturally & Linguistically Diverse Families

1. Research the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of families
2. Develop and understanding of cultural rules and norms
3. Understand gender differences in communication
4. Treat the family with respect
5. Conduct parental needs assessment
6. Conduct home visit to get to know family

Effective Communication with Parents

Teachers should:

- Give their total attention to parents.
- Use culturally appropriate communication.
- Listen and restate the parents' concerns.
- Show respect for the parents.
- Recognize the parents' feelings.
- Tailor discussions to fit parents' ability to handle situation.
- Emphasize that concerns are no one's fault.
- Remember that no one ever wins an argument.
- Protect the parents' egos.
- Focus on one issue at a time.
- Become allies with parents.

Effective Communication with Parents

Parents should:

- View teacher as a source of support for their child and themselves.
- Listen carefully and give total commitment to teacher.
- Show respect for teacher - recognize that the teacher's concerns, opinions, and questions are significant to mutual understanding and communication.
- Recognize that teacher has a difficult challenge to meet needs of all students. They help teacher succeed.
- Rephrase and check out understanding of messages during conversations or conferences.
- Speak openly and honestly about the child.
- Use concerns as forums for understanding the school and teacher.
- Become allies with teacher.

Communication Skills: Listening

- Be receptive
- Pay attention
- Use silence
- Seek agreement
- Avoid ambiguity
- Remove distractions
- Be patient

Communication Skills

- Positive Speaking
- Open response
  - encourages communication to continue
- Closed response
  - conversation ends
- Reflective Listening
  - ability to reflect speaker's feelings
    1. Use attending behavior. Make eye contact. Lean forward and be interested.
    2. Listen for the feeling behind the message.
    3. Respond with a statement of that feeling.

Communication Skills: I-We-You Messages

- I
  - takes ownership of responsibility
- You
  - implies receiver's responsibility
- We
  - implies shared ownership

1. When
   - Describe behavior that is bothering you
2. I feel
   - State how you feel about the concern
3. Because
   - Describe what you think might happen.

Communication Skills

- Rephrasing
  - restating the intent of the message in a condensed version to avoid misunderstanding
  - "It sounds as if you feel…." or "I'm hearing you say…"
    1. First, the listener must determine the basic message and the intent of the message.
    2. Second, the listener restates the intent of the message.
    3. Third, the listener checks out the accuracy of the rephrasing.

Communication Skills: Reframing

Problem	Concern	Example
Loud and boisterous	Very active	"Linda seems to be very active"
Gives others answers	Can't help sharing	"Juan is so excited about participating that sometimes he can't help himself…"
Steals	Takes without asking	"When Brittany plays sometimes she takes toys without asking."
Won't follow rules	Has own agenda; is determined	"Tanya is very independent even when she needs to follow my lead."
Talks too much	Likes to share with others	"Isabella has a lot of information to share."

Parent Education Programs

- **PET - Parent Effectiveness Training**
  - includes active listening, I messages, changing behavior by changing environment, parent–child conflicts, parental power, and "no-lose" conflict resolution methods
- **STEP - Systematic Training for Effective Parenting**
  - Variety of programs in English and Spanish, ages 6-12
  - Topics include topics that include listening, encouraging, learning to cooperate, and understanding emotions and beliefs

Parent Education Programs

- Active Parenting
  - Similar to PET &STEP
  - Goals of misbehavior, logical consequences, active communication, exploring alternatives, and family council meetings described
  - Include handbook and workbook supplement
  - Available in online format

Parent Teacher Conferences

- A parent-teacher conference is a collaborative effort to coordinate the best possible effort for the education of the child in the classroom.
- Conferences should be collaborative conversation between the parent-teacher or student-parent-teacher
- Goals and strategies to reach them should be discussed

Parent Teacher Conferences

- Should be scheduled with the parent in mind
- Should be in a private and comfortable place
- Should use the Sandwich Approach
  - Start with positive items, address any concerns/negative comments in the middle, finish with positive summary and planning

Prepare Beforehand for Teachers

- How well does my child get along with others? Who are my child's best friends?
- How does my child react to discipline? What methods do you use to promote self discipline and cooperation?
- Does my child select books at the proper reading level at the library?
- Does my child use study periods effectively?
- Are there any skills you are working on that we might reinforce at home?
- Do you expect me to help my child with homework? What does that look like to you?
- Are there any areas where my child needs special help?
- Does my child display any interests or talents that we might support at home?
- Does my child seem to be self-confident, happy, secure? If not, what can we do to promote these feelings?

Prepare Beforehand
for Parents

- How does your child seem to feel about school?
- Which activities does your child talk about at home?
- Which activities seem to stimulate your child's intellectual growth?
- How does your child spend free time?
- Is there anything your child dreads?
- What are your child's interests and hobbies?
- What concerns do you have?
- What kinds of support or collaboration would you like from the school to help your family?

Conference Steps

- Begin with objectives of the meeting
- Share samples of child's work and development
- Continue with two-way communication
- Discuss plans, goals, and strategies for progress
- Post -meeting follow up thanking parent for participation
- Continue communication throughout the year to maintain a strong relationship

Working with Angry Parents

1. Remain calm and courteous.
2. Use reflective listening and give reflective summaries of their statements.
3. Ask some open-ended questions to allow them to talk more as you gain more understanding.
4. Keep exploring until you determine the underlying critical issues.
   - Don't evaluate and don't be defensive.
5. After issues have been fully explored, rephrase and summarize.
6. Use as systematic problem solving approach in any unresolved issues.

Systematic Problem Solving Approach

1. Understand each other's needs and resources available to meet those needs
2. Formulate a hypothesis that might solve the problem
3. Brainstorm other solutions
4. Combine ideas and solutions to create new solutions
5. Together develop criteria to judge the solutions
6. Clarify and evaluate the solutions
7. Select the most likely solution

Tips for Successful Relationships

- Model working together as partners.
- Assess your motives before giving negative feedback.
  - Why are you telling this to the parent?
  - What do you hope will come out of this exchange?
  - Will it help the child's learning?
  - Do you expect a positive outcome?

Tips for Successful Relationships

- Avoid setting yourself up as THE authority figure.
- Try to avoid judging the parent.
- Give careful and thoughtful response to parent concerns.
- Be available and unhurried in your interaction.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Issues to Address
  - Mutual Respect
  - Casual Register
  - Way Discipline is Used in the Household
  - Way Time is Viewed
  - Role of School and Education

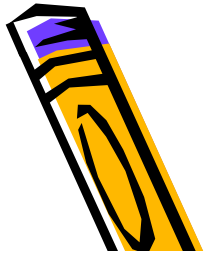
Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

For many parents in generational poverty, school is not given a high priority. It is often feared and resented. Their own personal experience may not have been positive, and school is alternately viewed as a babysitter or a necessary evil (i.e., "If I don't send my child, I will have to go to court").

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

When parents come in, because of their heavy reliance on a win/lose approach to conflict, they may begin with an in-your-face approach. Remember, they are doing this, consciously or unconsciously, as a show of strength. Just stay in the adult voice. Use language that is clear and straightforward. If you use "educationese," they're likely to think you're trying to cheat or trick them.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty



Use these kinds of phrases with parents from poverty (these are the types of comments they often use with their own children):

- "Learning this will help your child win more often."
- "The mind is a mental weapon that no one can take from you."
- "If you do this, your child will be smarter and won't get cheated or tricked."
- "Learning this will help your child make more money."
- "This information will help keep your child safer."
- "I know you love and care about your child very much or you wouldn't be here" (but don't say this if you don't mean it).

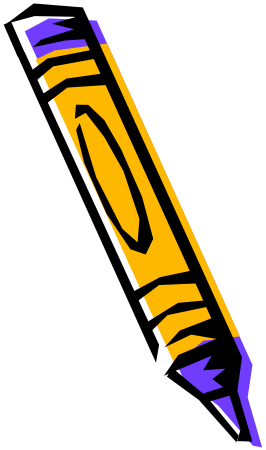
Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Discipline in generational poverty vacillates from being very permissive to very punitive. The emotional mood of the moment often determines what occurs. Also, in some cultures, the approach to boys is very different from the approach to girls.
- When the discipline is highly
- punitive, there is often a belief system that
  - (a) the harsher the punishment, the greater the forgiveness, and
  - (b) the harsher punishment will make the young person stronger and tougher.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Consequently, the notion of a systematic approach to discipline usually doesn't exist. There is rarely mediation or intervention about a behavior. Generally, it is a slap and a "Quit that."
- If guidance is being provided to the parent about behavior, use a WHAT, WHY, HOW approach with visuals.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty



1. **Stop** the behavior that is inappropriate.

2. Tell the child **what** he did wrong.

3. Tell the child **why** the behavior was wrong and its consequences.

because

4. Tell the child **how** to behave next time.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Why do parent usually come to school?
  - A crisis
  - Rarely do they come to the school for reasons that school people think are important.
- So the first question that must be asked when trying to get parents to school is: "What's in it for the parents?"

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- A study was done in 1993 with Chapter 1 schools looked only at schools that were 75% or more low-income.
- Administrators of the study then identified students within those schools who achieved and students who did not. They developed a questionnaire looking at criteria in and out of school to understand the variables that made a difference in achievement.
- Interestingly, whether parents actually went to school or attended meetings at school was not a significant factor.
- What made the biggest difference was whether or not parents provided these three things for their children:
    - support,
    - insistence, and
    - expectations.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty When They Come to School

1) Rather than the meeting format, **use the museum format**. That way parents can come and go when it's convenient for their schedule and their inclination.

In other words, the school would be open from 6 to 9 p.m. Parents could come to one room to watch a video or a student performance. These would be repeated every 20 to 30 minutes. Another room could have a formal meeting at a given time. Another room could have board games for the students. Another room could have food.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty When They Come to School

2) **Have food.** Give gift certificates to grocery stores. These tend to be popular. Another favorite is clothesbaskets that have soap, shampoo, perfumes, etc., since food stamps don't always allow those purchases.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty When They Come to School

3) Let the children come with the parents.

- There often is jealousy or suspicion by the husband when his wife goes out alone. If the woman's children are with her, there is none.
- School buildings tend to be big and confusing to parents. If the children go with them, the children help them find their way around.
- A babysitter frequently isn't available.
- Children are natural icebreakers. Parents meet each other through their children.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty When They Come to School

4) Have classes that benefit parents.

- For example: how to speak English; how to fill out a job application; how to get a Social Security card; how to make money mowing yards, doing child care, baking, and repairing small engines.
- Make your computer labs available on Saturdays to teach things like CAD (computer-aided design) and word processing-simple introductory courses that last four to five Saturdays for a couple of hours.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

Alternative Approaches

1) Use video. Virtually every home in poverty has a TV and a VCR or DVD player, even if it has very little else. Keep the videos under 15 minutes.

2) For all fliers home, use both verbal and visual information.

3) Provide simple, how-to activities that parents can do with children.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Many adults from poverty didn't have a positive school experience. The greeting of the first staff member they encounter (secretary, aide, administrator, teacher) will either confirm their earlier experience or counter it. Some sort of building procedure and greeting should be agreed upon.
- Always call them by Mr. or Mrs. (unless told otherwise). It's a sign of respect.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Identify your intent. Intent determines non-verbals.
  - Parents from poverty decide if they like you based largely on your non-verbals.
  - If they don't like you, they won't support you or work with you.
  - For example, if your intent is to win, that will be reflected in your non- verbals.
  - Likewise, if your intent is to understand, that will be reflected as well.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Use humor (not sarcasm). They particularly look to see if you have a sense of humor about yourself.
  - For example: Can you tell a story about yourself in which you weren't the hero? Can you poke fun at yourself?
- Deliver bad news through a story. If you state the bad news directly (e.g., your son was stealing), it will invite an automatic defense of the child.
  - Instead, say, "Let me tell you a story. Maybe you can help me with the situation." Make sure you use the word story.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- If you're comfortable using casual register, use it.
  - If not, don't use it. They'll probably think you're making fun of them.
- Be human and don't be afraid to indicate you don't have all the answers.
  - As alluded to, they distrust anyone who is "always the hero of his/her stories."

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Offer a cup of coffee.
  - In poverty, coffee is frequently offered as a sign of welcome.
- Use the adult voice.
  - Be understanding but firm. Be open to discussion, but don't change the consequences (unless new information surfaces or a better solution can be found).

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Be personally strong.
  - You aren't respected in generational poverty unless you are personally strong.
  - If you're threatened or have an in-your-face encounter, don't show fear. You don't need to be mean. Just don't show fear.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- If they're angry, they may appeal to physical power ("I'm going to beat you up!").
  - To calm them, say, "I know you love and care about your child very much or you wouldn't be here. What can we do that would show we also care?"
  - Another phrase that often works is: "Are you mad at me, or are you just mad?"

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Story structure in generational poverty is episodic and random, and the discourse pattern is circular.
  - Understand that these structures take much longer. Allow enough time during conferences for these structures to be used.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Home visits by teachers are the fastest and easiest way to build a huge parent support base quickly.
  - They also significantly reduce discipline issues.
  - Use Title I money to pay teachers to make phone calls and do home visits before there is a problem.
  - (The payoff from this one simple activity is tremendous.)

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- As you discuss situations with parents, ask yourself what resources are available to these individuals.
  - Some suggestions won't work because the resources simply aren't available.
- Don't accept behaviors from adults that you don't accept from students.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- In middle class, when a topic is introduced that the individual doesn't want to discuss, he/she simply changes the subject.
- In generational poverty, the individual often tells the person what he/she wants to hear, particularly if that person is in a position of authority.

Tips for Working with Parents from Poverty

- Remember, the parents from poverty talked about you in the neighborhood before they came to see you.
  - They often made outrageous comments about what they were going to say and do to you before they went to the school (entertainment is an important part of the culture of poverty).
  - So when they return to the neighborhood, they have to report back.
  - **Some comments you may end up hearing will be so outrageous that they should be ignored**.
  - They were made because they told people in the neighborhood they were going to do so.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- One of the hidden rules in affluence is: "It's not OK not to be perfect."
  - So identifying your personal weaknesses will not appeal to them particularly.
  - They want to know that you are very good at what you do.
  - On the other hand, if you don't know something, don't try to bluff your way through. They will usually call your bluff.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- Another hidden rule in affluence is that you aren't respected unless you're able to discriminate by quality or artistic merit.
  - Wealthy parents won't respect you unless you have expertise.
  - If you aren't knowledgeable in a particular area, read the experts or get a school district expert to sit in with you for the meeting.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- Don't use humor- at least initially-when discussing their child or situation.
  - If you do, they'll think you don't care about them or their child.
- Don't use circular discourse or casual register. They want to get straight to the point and discuss the issue through formal register.
  - They won't respect you if you waste their time.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- Do use the adult voice with affluent parents.
  - Understand that they are skilled negotiators.
  - Clearly establish parameters when discussing issues with them. Affluent parents often believe that they and their children don't need to follow or adhere to the "rules" of the organization.
  - Be firm about those boundaries.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- Emphasize issues of safety, legal parameters, and the need for the student to develop coping mechanisms for greater success later in life.
- Understand that a primary motivator for wealthy parents is the financial, social, and academic success of their child. They're very interested in what you'll be able to do to help their child be successful.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- When affluent parents come to school and are upset, they likely will appeal to positional power, financial power, or connections ("I know the school board president" ... "I'll call my lawyer" ...).
- They also will attack the issues. Be prepared to articulate the issues, and use experts by name in the discussion.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- Don't be intimidated by the affluent parent.
- Do understand, regardless of your position, who is standing behind you to support you.
  - If you have little or no support above you, make sure you don't paint yourself into a corner. Affluent parents will rattle the organizational "cage" in order to get what they want.

Tips for Working With Parents from Wealth

- Understand the competitive nature of wealth (especially among those with "new money") and the need to excel. Their children are expected to be the best.
  - There tends to be disrespect for those in the service sector, including public service.
  - However, if their child is happy and doing well, most of them will be incredibly supportive.

Tips for Working With Overprotective Parents

Try to determine the cause:

a. Child is a possession-defend your own no matter what they do.

b. Child is proof of parenting success-it's not OK not to be perfect.

c. Fear of loss-death, affection, loyalty.

d. Loss of another child-want to protect this child.

e. Change personal experience-"My mother never loved me."

f. Beliefs about parenting-"I just want to love him or her."

g. Emotional need of parent-loneliness, co-dependence, addiction.

Tips for Working With Overprotective Parents

Questions to Ask

a. What is the very worst thing that could happen if we…?

b. What is the very best thing that could happen if we…?

c. What coping strategies could your child learn so that he or she could be more successful?

Tips for Working with Overprotective Parents

d. I know you love and care about your child very much. What can we do so that you know we love and care about him or her too?

e. Is there any evidence the fear is a reality?

f. How will this request help your child be more successful?

g. At what age will you allow your child to be responsible for his or her own actions?

Appeals

Affluent Parents

- Among affluent parents, an appeal to one of the following is effective:
  - safety,
  - expertise,
  - legalities, or
  - coping strategies to be more successful.

Parents from Poverty

- Among parents from poverty, an appeal to
  - caring,
  - winning,
  - being smarter, or
  - not getting cheated is effective.

Your Turn

- Working with your group, prepare a brief (5-10 minute) role play presentation of your scenario using these three perspectives.
  - Teacher
  - Parent
  - Moderator or Narrator
- Answer these questions in your presentation:
  - What is driving the parent behavior?
  - What questions should you ask the parent?
  - What interventions would you make?